



United States Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

Colleagues and friends:

Crime has exploded in northern Central America, and Honduras now has the world's highest murder rate outside of war zones. Citizens there feel almost powerless to loosen the grip of gangs, transnational criminal organizations, and corrupt officials. These problems threaten the security and prosperity of Honduras and the region while exacerbating all forms of trafficking and gang activities that reach into the United States.



Corporal Jason Kidd (striped shirt), an adviser from the Harrisonburg, Virginia, Police Department, discusses crime prevention techniques with members of the Honduran National Police

During a recent trip to the capital, Tegucigalpa, I had a chance to learn more about the challenges. At the request of the Honduran government and the U.S. Embassy, CSO is providing short-term, high-impact assistance to make the streets safer. CSO's initiatives are nested in the [Central America Regional Security Initiative](#) (CARSI) and related U.S. programs that seek to reduce violence, dismantle criminal networks, and build institutional capacity in the region to promote the rule of law.

The gravity of the problem hit home during drives through the city. In a number of areas almost no one was out on the streets. In front of many homes and businesses were men with shotguns. Yet there are hopeful signs. A nonprofit that we are supporting, the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ), helps find murder witnesses, put them in touch with trustworthy police, and protect them so that the crimes can be solved. As a result, the number of homicides in Nueva Suyapa, where ASJ operates, dropped from 42 in 2005 to 10 in 2010, and more than 80 percent of cases ASJ has worked on since 2005 have resulted in convictions and prison sentences. We hope to find ways to duplicate this impressive model.

There also is progress to report on a major underlying cause of the crime problem: police corruption. CSO is supporting government and NGO efforts to reform both the police and the attorney general's office, and the government has dismissed dozens of officers. Minister of Security Pompeo Bonilla told me that he plans to continue doing so while improving training, including on human rights.

CSO's foremost ally in this endeavor is [Alianza](#) (Alliance for Peace and Justice), an umbrella group of Honduran NGOs. The organization's most prominent member is Julieta Castellanos, rector of the University of Honduras, whose son was killed by police. CSO is funding the Alianza's mass media campaign, which includes TV ads and billboards, promoting purges of dishonest police and building public support for reform. Credit also goes to our ambassador, Lisa Kubiske. She has been steadfast, effectively encouraging Honduran officials to root out corrupt officers. It is a pleasure to work with her.

Since elections are coming in the fall, we feel a special sense of urgency to make progress now. With our U.S. government and Honduran partners, CSO is focusing on:

- Spreading models that can quell violence in troubled neighborhoods, not one by one but nationwide,
- Using our media knowledge to build overwhelming support for purges,
- Ensuring that legislation to reform the police and other justice institutions is passed, and
- Most of all, empowering our local partners to the hilt; they can lead Honduras out of distress.

Everyone recognizes the difficulties of succeeding in a society with weak institutions that just a few years ago suffered a constitutional crisis and coup. While in Tegucigalpa, I met with a wide range of Hondurans, from crime victims to the president of the National Congress. Their determination to make their country safe again was clear, and we hope that the initiatives we are helping them carry out will succeed.

Our Honduras work is part of a broader effort to bring [innovative approaches to conflict-prevention and response](#) throughout the State Department. We welcome your ideas on how we can help nations beleaguered by conflict. You can write us at CSOpublic@state.gov. We also encourage you to forward our news to people you think would like to join this conversation. You can read previous dispatches [here](#).

Best,

Ambassador Rick Barton
Assistant Secretary for Conflict and Stabilization Operations

P.S. CSO received coverage in a story that *The Economist* just published about Secretary Clinton's legacy. It said, in part: "One of the QDDR's most important results has been the creation of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, a member of the new J family. Although still in its infancy, the bureau is showing signs that it may make an impact. It is playing a big role in America's effort to support the opposition in Syria, and has launched a demining initiative for Myanmar as part of attempts to bolster the country's transition to democracy. It is also active in Kenya, where elections are approaching, and where it hopes to help avoid a repetition of the chaos and bloodshed of the 2007 elections."

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